DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 344 417 EC 301 146

AUTHOR Weintraub, Frederick J.
TITLE Gifted Children: Making the Year 2000 Theirs.
PUB DATE Mar 92
NOTE 4p.; In: Challenges in Gifted Education: Developing Potential and Investing in Knowledge for the 21st Century; see EC 301 131.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Quality; *Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Futures (of Society); *Gifted; Long Range Planning; Outcomes of Education; Political Influences; Special Education; State Programs; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS Ohio

ABSTRACT

This concluding chapter notes the changes in education for the gifted in the past 25 years and looks to the future. It notes that preceding chapters have demonstrated that the field of gifted and talented education has a rich history of significant accomplishment, has provided a sound body of knowledge to guide education of these students, and has demonstrated that special educational programming produces better learning in these students. Educators are encouraged to utilize the political spirit of the day to promote gifted education, which at the present time requires emphasizing gifted education's role in helping the United States compete in a global economy. Ohioans are congratulated for coming together and developing a long range strategic plan for gifted education. Positive change in gifted education is seen to require people who are bold enough to take the necessary risks. (One reference) (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Gifted Children: Making the Year 2000 Theirs

Frederick J. Weintraub — *Assistant Executive Director for Communication, The Council for Exceptional Children*

ED344417

Almost 25 years ago, half of my life ago, I was invited to lunch at the National Press Club by Roy Millenson, a member of Senator Jacob Javits' staff. "The Senator would like to do something on behalf of the gifted," he said. "What does CEC suggest and what are you willing to do to make it happen?"

I remember returning to The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) office knowing little about the gifted and probably less about politics. I shared my concern with the late Bill Geer, CEC's executive director, who responded with "DO it." A year later, the first federal legislation for the gifted and talented was passed and I embarked on a career as a lobbyist for students with exceptionalities.

A friend once said that change is merely a result of time and circumstances. That may be true; however, advocates can seize upon the conditions of the time, creating the circumstances necessary to achieve the objectives for which they advocate. Those of us who are committed to a better future for our nation's gifted and talented students should not be limited by what may appear to be a nonsupportive political environment.

As I read the preceding chapters, a number of insights emerged. First, the field of gifted and talented education has a rich history of significant accomplishment. Second, a sound body of knowledge exists to guide effective education for these students. Third, we have evidence that special educational programming produces better learning. And finally, there is a vision that can guide us toward a better future.

Why, then, are we so far away from extending appropriate learning opportunities to all students who are gifted and talented? And, why are existing programs at risk in this era of economic constraint and educational restructuring?

While there appears to be a common vision for the future, there is a corresponding lack of clarity regarding who we are. Is there a field of gifted and talented education? Do we hold common values and beliefs? Do we support each other? Are we part of the field of general education or special education, or are we separate? What are the ties that bind us together? As I talk with professionals and parents in the area of gifted education, the lack of a coherent identity becomes increasingly evident. Often, the result is a lack of trust, an inability to find a common purpose and, more important, the lack of an identity in the political world of decision making.

Advocates in the area of gifted and talented education do band together, primarily in times of great strife. For example, the Coalition for the Advancement of Gifted Education (CAGE) was formed in the early 1980's when the Gifted and Talented Children's Educational Assistance Act was repealed. CAGE's purpose was to unite the diverse gifted and talented organizations for the purpose of defining an appropriate federal role and developing a lobbying force to achieve that role. Building consensus and trust among members of these groups, although difficult, was achieved. The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act was the outcome of that truly collaborative effort. Once the law was passed and

EC 301146

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

funding realized, everyone went their separate ways once more. The battle had been won, but advocates failed to see it as part of a much larger war. Maintaining the status quo is not sufficient. Rather, members of the gifted and talented community must unite to shape and achieve a common vision for the future education of our most able youngsters.

Individuals with strong beliefs sometimes presume that others share their beliefs or, with appropriate indoctrination, will come to embrace their beliefs. Thus, we continue to be surprised when educators, politicians, and others behave in ways that are inconsistent with our beliefs. Our dream of a world where the interests of children and youth with exceptionalities are given priority status is far from reality. Therefore, we must, like other minority interests, work together to create the policies, resources, and advocacy necessary to assure continuing appropriate behaviors on the part of decision makers who have the power to impact the quality of education for students with exceptionalities.

In a field of limited resources, it is difficult at times for people to rise above the needs of self in order to advocate for the common good. For example, parents who struggle to have the needs of their child met, often have little energy left to advocate for other children. Similarly, the competition in the marketplace for economic survival often drives many well-intentioned people to promote their ideas, products, models, and organizations, to the detriment of others. The result is that the market of opportunity for children does not expand, a market that if fully developed would allow for the needs of many individuals to be met.

The ongoing debate in gifted education — developing children's abilities for their own intrinsic purposes versus preparing children to fill the economic and social needs of our nation — while intellectually stimulating, has little political value. The political milieu of our nation swings between the interests of the individual and the interests of the state. In the current political environment, gifted and talented education should be promoted as a means of developing the talent that will enable us to compete in a global economy. In the future, a message of individualism and self-fulfillment may be emphasized. We will truly continue to be hostage to changing times and circumstances unless we are willing to use them for our benefit.

This is a time of great risk and great opportunity. We know how to identify and educate students who are gifted and talented in ways that will increase their educational achievement. We have the knowledge to better serve the increasing number of students who are ethnically- and culturally-diverse, and culturally disadvantaged. We know that our nation is in trouble because we have not invested in developing all our children's talent. And we know that for the first time there is a high level of national energy, regardless of how misguided it may be, devoted to achieving better outcomes. The challenge to us is "carpe diem" — seize the day.

The citizens of Ohio in developing *Interacting for Quality Learning: A Gifted Education Strategic Plan for the 1990's* (Ohio Department of Education, 1991) have shown that individuals with diverse interests can unite to chart a course for the future. Similar efforts should be taken in each state and at the national level. Such planning must be forward-thinking and relevant to the current school reform and political climate.

As we promote greater inclusiveness in our schools, we must be able to build and strengthen a gifted advocacy community whose members, regardless of their diversity, share common values and commitments. A balance of professionals, parents, and others who have a stake in advocating

for our children is needed to fight the battles. Advocates for persons with disabilities and advocates for the gifted and talented have a great deal in common and, together, offer great potential for impacting the political system in positive ways.

The problems of American business will not be solved by complaining about the Japanese and other competitors, but rather by actively meeting the needs of American customers. So, too, must members of the gifted and talented community become activists, proposing viable solutions to the needs of the political marketplace.

Instead of competing with ourselves for scarce resources, we must begin to compete in the marketplace for a larger share of the total resource. To do this requires an understanding that we will not succeed solely by our good ideas, deeds, or intentions, but rather by the size, quality, and unity of our advocacy.

Change that would have been unfathomable not too long ago has occurred in recent years. That change was driven by people who had a vision for the future and who were bold enough to take the necessary risks. This is what we teach our children in gifted and talented education. They should expect no less from us.

REFERENCES

Ohio Department of Education. (1991). *Interacting for quality learning: A gifted education strategic plan for the 1990's.* Columbus: Ohio Department of Education.